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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 REYKJAVIK 000116

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SUBJECT: ICELAND: PARLIAMENT APPROVES RESOLUTION CONDEMNING GUANTANAMO

REF: SECTO 003 DTG 070102Z JUN 08

Classified by Amb Carol van Voorst for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Iceland's parliament unanimously passed a non-binding resolution on May 30 calling for the closure of the U.S. detention facility at Guantanamo Bay. The resolution further called for the Government of Iceland to convey that message to the U.S. government; Iceland's Foreign Minister did so later that day during her meeting with visiting Secretary of State Rice. Given the timing, news of the resolution and the issue of Guantanamo Bay dominated the press coverage of the Secretary's visit. Some media - implicitly criticizing the FM -- have since speculated that the resolution and its timing irritated the U.S. enough to scuttle hopes of U.S. support for Iceland's UN Security Council bid. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (U) In the early morning hours of May 30, the Althingi (Icelandic Parliament) unanimously voted in favor of a non-binding resolution which calls for the closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility. The resolution cites the "inhumane treatment of prisoners" as a justification to close the facility. The GOI is also charged with communicating the position of the Althingi to U.S. authorities, according to the resolution. (Full resolution text para 8) All political parties represented in the Althingi supported the resolution, which led to a vote of 52 in favor, zero opposing, and 11 not present. Nine parliamentarians sponsored the bill, all of whom belong to the Left-Green Party of Iceland. The Althingi Foreign Affairs Committee approved the resolution on May 28, sending the resolution to a full floor vote the following day.

¶13. (C) Although the resolution passed on the eve of Secretary Rice's visit, this timing seemed more a function of the legislative calendar than an effort to send a political message. The resolution was originally introduced in February and had been lingering in the Althingi since then, until the legislature's last-week sprint to finish its work before the summer recess beginning on May 30. However, the timing ensured that Guantanamo Bay would be a central issue in coverage of the visit. (Comment: Ministry contacts have confirmed to post that they failed to realize how much the issue would overwhelm other reporting on the visit and as such had not tried to intervene in the legislative calendar. End Comment.) Press and blog speculation about whether or not Foreign Minister Ingibjorg Solrun Gisladottir would present the Secretary with a copy of the resolution began immediately after the Foreign Affairs Committee vote on May 28. That said, the final text incorporated several amendments softening the language to remove a description of the Guantanamo facility's operations as "illegal" and eliminating a call for the Icelandic Government to work in international fora towards the facility's closure.

¶14. (U) FM Gisladottir raised Guantanamo with Secretary Rice during their May 30 meeting and passed a copy of the resolution to the Secretary (reftel). In her comments to the press afterwards, FM Gisladottir confirmed that she did indeed bring up concerns about Guantanamo while meeting with the Secretary. When asked about the resolution by the press, Secretary Rice stated that she strongly objected to the notion that there are human rights violations

occurring at Guantanamo Bay. The Secretary also noted that returning inmates to their country of origin is quite complicated. She added that there have been instances of former detainees engaging in attacks on US forces and innocent civilians. Finally, Secretary Rice suggested that members of the Althingi read the OSCE Parliamentary Committee report on Guantanamo Bay. (Full press conference transcript: http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2008/05/105_447.htm)

¶15. (SBU) As expected, Icelandic press coverage of the Secretary's visit was heavily focused on the Guantanamo Bay resolution. Most print articles mentioned that FM Gisladottir provided Secretary Rice with a copy of the resolution; most also noted the Secretary's rebuttal of the charge of human rights abuses at Guantanamo Bay. In response, a June 2 editorial in daily paper of record Morgunbladid entitled, "Condescending Rice," stated that Secretary Rice had a condescending attitude toward the Althingi's resolution.

¶16. (C) More provocatively, a June 9 editorial comment in Morgunbladid claimed that Secretary Rice was angry and caught off guard by the resolution. The article went on to say that the relationship between the Secretary and the Foreign Minister was greatly damaged due to this resolution, and speculated that as a result the U.S. might not support Iceland in elections to the UN Security Council this fall. Embassy protested to Morgunbladid and Ambassador immediately communicated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and other political actors that this story was false and in no way sourced from USG participants in the meeting. Separately, the MFA's Counsellor for Human Rights issues told Pol Chief that the resolution was "silly" and did not offer a useful contribution to the debate about how international law should handle the detainees or similar cases. This tendency to focus on the emotional principle of closing Guantanamo rather than the legal issue

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of the detainees' cases was reinforced in the scant local coverage (mostly translated wire reports) of the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on June 12 in Boumediene v. Bush.

¶17. (C) COMMENT: Detainees at Guantanamo continue to be a hot topic here, and as elsewhere in Europe there is a broad consensus that the detention facility should be closed, with no critical examination of how the law should best deal with the detainees' cases. In this climate the Althingi's unanimous vote on the resolution was nearly inevitable. However, as the June 9 editorial comment indicates, all news is local, and some have seized upon the issue as a chance to criticize the MFA for allegedly sloppy handling of Iceland's foreign affairs. We have since seized every opportunity to both point out that the Secretary's conversation with FM Gisladottir was simply a frank talk between allies as well as encourage a sincere discussion of the complex legal principles involved. END COMMENT.

¶18. (U) Text of Althingi resolution: The Althingi condemns the inhumane treatment of prisoners at the US detention camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, urges that the camp be closed and charges the Government of Iceland to communicate this position to the US authorities.

End text.

van Voorst